



# REFERENCE GUIDE: BUILDING ACORN RESOURCE GUIDES FOR VETERANS

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*The ACORN initiative is a dedicated VA effort to identify and address Veterans' health-related social needs in clinical settings. As a screening and resource referral program, Veterans are screened to better understand their unmet social needs, and receive a targeted resource guide for any identified needs.*

This reference guide provides guidance on how to compile resources for each social need included in the ACORN screening tool to create high quality, location-specific guides for Veterans. Also included are style suggestions, examples, and a Guide Completion Checklist (Page 5).

## BACKGROUND

Connecting Veterans with existing support services in their communities is an essential step in beginning the process to addressing their needs.

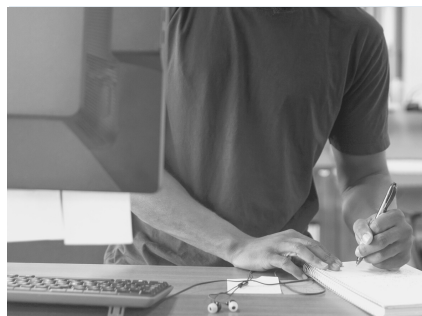
ACORN's resource guides are meant to be short and comprehensive, with a focus on quality over quantity. In addition to support services, all guides should also include a VA-based social work contact who can assist Veterans with meeting their needs.

Each resource guide is one page, and consists of VA-specific and community-based resources. The guides should be updated regularly to ensure clinics are providing quality resources that target the unique social needs that most affect our Veterans.

ACORN currently screens Veterans for ten domains of social risk. Based on their responses, Veterans may then be given a resource guide for the associated domain. Resource guide topics include:

- Education
- Employment
- Food and Nutrition
- Housing
- Legal Support
- Personal Safety and Wellbeing
- Social Support
- Transportation
- Treatment and Clinical Care
- Utilities and Technology Assistance





### KEEP IN MIND: ONE PAGE EACH

The resource guides are purposefully only one page single-sided. The point is not to overwhelm the Veteran with a long list that may discourage them from engaging with organizations to receive services.

By keeping the guides to one page, Veterans feel less burdened and reaching out to organizations can feel more achievable.

## COMPILING RESOURCES: BEGINNING THE PROCESS

### Developing a Plan of Action

Finding resources to build ten resource guides may seem daunting, but active collaboration with community programs and contacts can be highly valuable in the process of finding quality resources.

#### VA Social Workers

When your team begins the process of compiling resources, be sure to connect with the social workers at the VA Medical Centers (VAMC) and Community-based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) where the screening will be deployed. Social workers will have considerable knowledge of the social support services in your surrounding area from their own referrals, and can help select which resources might be best suited for the guides.

Soliciting help from the clinical social workers will also ensure there is consistency between their own referrals for Veterans and where the clinics utilizing the screening are referring patients.

### FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Department of Elder Services (DES)

### VA PROGRAMS

- Department of Housing and Urban Development - VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program
- Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families (SSVF)
- Veterans Justice Outreach Program (VJO)
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST) Treatment Program

### Federal and VA-Specific Support Programs

Veterans almost always have the ability to enroll in and receive services from VA-specific and federal programs, such as the ones listed to the left. Programs like these can be a useful resource to include on the guides.

Federal programs are national and all applicable citizens have the opportunity to access their services.

Most VA-specific programs are also widely accessible, though some services may vary from location to location. Always contact all local VA programs to confirm their services, and whether they have location-specific eligibility criteria. This is especially true if a resource is available for VAMCs and CBOCs that may be operating in different counties.

Additionally, the list to the left is not exhaustive; feel free to find and list other federal and VA-specific programs in your guides as you find them most useful.

**A Note on Federal Programs:** the resource guides are location-specific to best promote accessibility for Veterans in your area. If a local program is more comprehensive and accessible to Veterans, you can include it in addition to or in place of a federal program.

# COMPILING RESOURCES: TIPS TO CONSIDER

## Considering the Availability of Resources

### Choosing from a Long List

Depending on the social need, there may be an abundance of resources and organizations that serve to address needs and offer services for Veterans. If you find that there are too many resources to include for a guide, consider the following questions:

1. How comprehensive are the program's services compared to similar programs?
2. How easy will it be for the Veteran to contact the program to apply, enroll, and receive services?
3. Are the program and services free or offered at a reduced cost?
4. Does the program have a specific contact who may be willing to directly triage calls from your Veterans?
5. Is the program easily accessible by Veterans in your area through all potential modes of transportation, including public transit and rideshares?

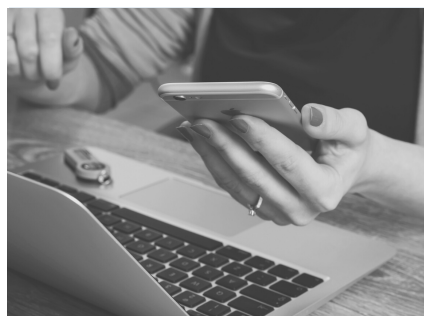
Keeping these factors in mind will help your team determine which resources are most appropriate for the Veterans your clinics are serving. Remember, it's important to include the resources that can benefit the most Veterans who are receiving the guides in your clinics.

Additionally, keep in mind that it may be useful to add the time period of availability for some resources with set deadlines or timeframes. It can be useful to note if any of the resources are available annually, and the time period for when a Veteran can apply or utilize the resource. Providing this information can be useful to Veterans, who can know of future dates should they be interested in the provided resource, and prepare in advance for when resource reopens.

### Finding Quality Alternatives

On the other hand, availability of local or in-person resources for certain social needs may be limited for your area, or may only be offered at certain periods in time. This may result in fewer resources being listed on the guide.

It can be helpful to include potential alternatives for Veterans, such as the inclusion of virtual programming or phone apps. **Note:** Take care when including any virtual programming that you have considered their ease of accessibility and whether a Veteran will need access to WiFi or a smartphone.



#### KEEP IN MIND:

#### GATHER ALL THE CORRECT INFORMATION

It's important to reach out to all social services directly, either through phone or email, in order to collect the necessary information for Veterans.

You should always verify the availability of services, eligibility criteria, correct location(s), and contact information, including phone number, email address, and website URL.



# BUILDING THE RESOURCE GUIDES: TIPS TO CONSIDER

## Including All of the Necessary Components

While each resource guide may take on a unique page layout to best utilize the space, there are things that must be included on every guide. Refer to the **Guide Completion Checklist** on the following page to ensure all resource guides are equipped with the necessary information.

### Website Links

When including website URLs on the guides, take care of the potential wordiness and length of the link. For Veterans who are receiving paper copies of the guides, it may be difficult to type out long, confusing links.

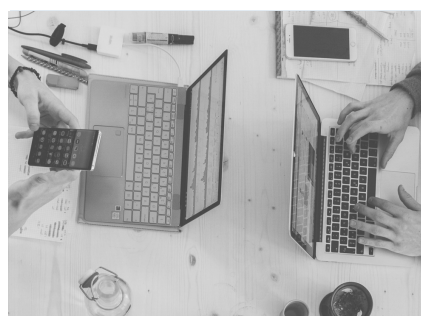
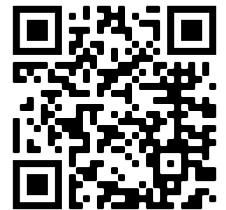
As such, delete any variations of "https://" that appear at the beginning of the link and any extra "/" at the end. Additionally, be sure all links start with "www." for consistency and so Veterans know for sure they are website links.

If you are concerned a link is too long, use [www.bitly.com](http://www.bitly.com) to shorten the link.

### Helpful, But Optional, Additions

There are some things that can be included on the resource guides to help Veterans understand and access the resources.

- **QR Codes:** Quick Response (QR) codes can be placed next to a resource as a way for Veterans to be able to quickly accessing the resource website by scanning the code with their phone. QR codes can be created for free on [www.qr-code-generator.com](http://www.qr-code-generator.com). If you do choose to use QR codes, be sure that any generated code matches the website link listed on the guide. Additionally, include an explanation on what they are and their purpose at the start of the Table of Contents page.
- **Subtitles:** At times, certain types of events (i.e., natural disasters, physical closures due to stay-at-home orders, etc.) may require your team to create temporary resource guides to include potential changes in the resources' information. For temporary guides, be sure to note this in a subtitle underneath the resource title.
- **Summaries:** If you plan to group similar resources by headings, it may be helpful to include a short introduction to the sectioned groups.
- **Notes:** If you wish to highlight an important point in the resource overview or if the program has temporarily changed operating procedures, mark this information as special so that the Veteran can quickly find the additional context.



### KEEP IN MIND: FINAL REMINDERS WHEN BUILDING

- Ensure all contact information was copied correctly and proofread your summaries for any spelling or grammar mistakes.
- Use the same colors and fonts when differentiating resource names and contact information so that it's easy to pick out each individual resource.
- Leave as much white space when possible.





## GUIDE COMPLETION CHECKLIST ✓

### ***For the finished document...***

- ☐ Cover Page with location listed (*i.e.*, VAMC or CBOC name and city/state)
- ☐ Table of Contents

### ***Required for each listed resource...***

- ☐ VA Social Work contact (*full name and phone number*) should be listed in the same place on every guide
- ☐ Full program title and acronym
- ☐ Contact information, as applicable (*phone number, website link, address, and contact email*)
- ☐ Available contact hours and/or hours of operation
- ☐ Concise, informative overview of available services
- ☐ Any necessary eligibility requirements
- ☐ For the Personal Safety and Wellbeing Guide, include the phrase: "If you are in immediate danger, please dial 911" at the top of the guide
- ☐ For any virtual or phone apps, include whether they are only available on certain phones or platforms (*i.e.*, *iPhone, Android, requires a Gmail account, etc.*)

### ***Optional Additions...***

- ☐ Working QR Codes for all applicable resources, if desired
- ☐ For temporary event guides, include the subtitle to denote that the information provided on the guides is only applicable during the specified time period
- ☐ Headings for grouped resources and quick summaries, if desired
- ☐ Special notes highlighting important information for resources, as applicable (*examples can include temporary operating procedures or alerting the Veteran where the quick exit buttons are for domestic violence websites*)

Last Update: August 2020

## KEEP IN MIND: MAINTAINING THE GUIDES

The guides should be updated about **every six months** to ensure accurate information.

Other than general closures, programs may have moved locations, hired new personnel, or have modified their services or eligibility requirements, so it is important to make sure the guides are updated frequently.

## REFERENCE: THE RESOURCE GUIDE IN ACTION

### Resource Guide Example

Below is an example of a "Treatment and Clinical Care" resource guide that was built using this reference guide to create a cohesive document. This page shows the Brockton Womens Health Clinic, part of the VA Boston Healthcare System, created for the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Note:** Remember that it is not required to follow this page format; feel free to design unique layouts that best display your resources in a way that is visually appealing and easy for a Veteran to follow and utilize.

#### Title and Subtitle

Highlights the social need that the included resources address, as well as alerting that the information presented is specific for a temporary event.

#### Key Information Consistency

Note how all phone numbers and website links have their own matching colors. For pages with many resources, it is important to visually separate the contact information.

#### QR Codes

Along with shortening the links as needed, QR codes are used for faster access to the resources by scanning the code.

#### Notes

Notes can be used for Veterans to easily find important information, as was the case for the temporary guides created for the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Social Work Contact

Be sure to visually separate this section in the same dedicated place on each guide. This can help Veterans find the Social Work contact in case they require additional help with accessing resources.

### Transportation Resources for use during COVID-19



#### VA BOSTON HEALTHCARE SYSTEM SHUTTLE SERVICE (857) 364 5234 (Call in advance to confirm schedule times) General Schedule: [www.boston.va.gov/visitors/shuttle.pdf](http://www.boston.va.gov/visitors/shuttle.pdf)



The shuttle service provides transportation to the VA Boston Healthcare System's main sites (Brockton, Jamaica Plain, and West Roxbury), and other sites including the Causeway and Worcester Clinics.

**NOTE:** During COVID-19, the VABHS shuttle service is operating on a limited schedule. Please call before you need to be picked up to confirm the daily schedule.

#### BROCKTON AREA TRANSIT (BAT) [www.ridebat.com](http://www.ridebat.com) BAT Schedule during COVID-19: [www.bit.ly/2RhVkhC](https://www.bit.ly/2RhVkhC)



The BAT provides access to VA Boston's Brockton Campus via the 3 Bus. BAT now accepts and offers a reduced fare with MBTA Charlie Cards. For more information, please visit the website for routes, schedules, and fares.

**NOTE:** During COVID-19, BAT is operating reduced services. Starting on April 6th, all city routes will be running on an hourly schedule and service will end at 7:00pm. Seating capacity will also be reduced on most buses. Customers are encouraged to board the bus from the rear entrance and exit out the front to minimize close contact.

#### DIAL-A-BAT (508) 638-5920 [www.ridebat.com/dial-a-bat](http://www.ridebat.com/dial-a-bat)



BAT also provides ADA para-transit service for people with disabilities. This service provides shared-ride, door-to-door van transportation, and runs on the same days as the fixed-route bus service (within 3/4 mile of fixed route).

Dial-A-Bat is available for residents in Brockton, Abington, Avon, Bridgewater, West Bridgewater, East Bridgewater, Whitman and parts of Stoughton.

**NOTE:** During COVID-19, Dial-A-Bat is only transporting residents to essential services (i.e., medical appointments, pharmacies, grocery stores), and they ask riders to please wear a mask when using their services.

#### MBTA CARDS (781) 687-2375 [www.mbta.com/fares/reduced](http://www.mbta.com/fares/reduced)



The MBTA can provide assistance to Veterans who are with limited funds and in need of transportation. If you are an active-duty military personnel, you can ride the MBTA for free. If in plainclothes, please present a valid military ID to MBTA staff. If in uniform, no identification is necessary.

**NOTE:** During COVID-19, the MBTA Charlie Card store is currently closed. The MBTA is also operating on reduced services. Customers are encouraged to board the bus from the rear entrance and exit out the front to minimize close contact.

#### QUICK NOTE

Please contact **Jennie Lindsay-Kelley** at (774) 826-2078 should you have any questions about the information on this page or need additional assistance with these or other resources.

### HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

Building targeted resource guides will be a learning experience full of growth and obstacles. Should any questions arise during this process, please reach out to the ACORN team at [VHABEDACORN@va.gov](mailto:VHABEDACORN@va.gov).